

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 3CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR
23 May 1985

Questions about nations' nuclear ability make US policymaking complex

By George D. Moffett III
Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

Washington

Do Israel and South Africa know more about nuclear weapons than they say they do?

Two recent reports — both of which have been challenged — say they might:

- The trade journal *Aerospace Daily* last week said it had confirmed an earlier report that Israel has deployed several intermediate-range Jerico II missiles armed with nuclear warheads. According to an unnamed US source cited in the article, the missiles — which are mounted on erector-launcher trucks and which have a range of 700 kilometers — have been deployed in the Negev Desert and the Golan Heights. The report says the Jerico missiles are part of a large, growing Israeli nuclear force.

- The Washington Office on Africa Educational Fund, an anti-apartheid group, says it has new evidence that South Africa and Israel may have collaborated on a nuclear test in 1979. The report, which cites data on seismic disturbances and high levels of radioactivity among Australian sheep, says a double flash of light recorded by a United States Air Force satellite over the South Atlantic in September 1979 was probably the "signature" of a nuclear explosion.

Neither report has been conclusively confirmed. But they illustrate the extent to which policymakers are forced to deal in a shadowy world of speculation.

"These could be extraordinary historical events," says Leonard Spector of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "But at best, we're dealing with possibilities, not definitives. The Israeli case is purely speculative. In South Africa, we're not only not sure whether there was a test, we're not even sure who might have conducted it."

"It's like the famous Heisenberg principal, in reverse: The more important the event, the harder it is to know whether it actually occurred or not."

Israel has long been assumed to have the technical capacity to manufacture and assemble nuclear explosive devices — perhaps within weeks or even days in an emergency.

"We've known for years that Israel is within a screw-driver's turn of having a nuclear arsenal," says one knowledgeable arms control specialist.

But according to the *Aerospace Daily* report, Israel has already crossed the nuclear threshold, becoming a small but full-fledged member of the nuclear club.

Reports of the Jerico II deployments, says *Aerospace Daily's* unnamed source, are "only the tip of the iceberg."

Many here question the authenticity of the *Aerospace Daily* report, saying the deployment of nuclear forces would be too easily discovered and would be contrary to Israel's own interests.

"No doubt Israel has the components in hand, but it's unlikely they would deploy a weapon," says another senior arms control specialist. "For one thing, such a move would lend impetus to the development of an Islamic bomb."

In a statement yesterday, an Israeli Embassy spokes-

man said Israel stands by its policy that it "would not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons into the region." In a separate statement, the US State Department said it could not confirm the *Aerospace Daily* report.

Some critics have also dismissed the report on South Africa, saying the new evidence cited — according to one US expert on nuclear issues — "may be pretty thin gruel to make a porridge."

Shortly after the US Air Force "Vela" satellite recorded a light flash, a special commission of scientists appointed by then-President Jimmy Carter concluded that the phenomenon was probably caused by some "space" event, possibly a collision with a small meteoroid.

But the South Africa study says that data obtained from the US Naval Research Laboratory under the Freedom of Information Act — data it says was disregarded by the Carter group — confirms that the light flash was actually evidence of a nuclear test. The report says the Defense Intelligence Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency "joined the NRL in its determination that a nuclear bomb had been detonated."

The report also charges the Carter administration with a cover-up, saying confirmation of a nuclear test would have adversely affected Carter foreign policies in the Middle East and southern Africa and jeopardized the support of Jewish voters in an election year.

"Our report stops short of saying that South Africa developed the bomb — but we are saying there's sufficient evidence to reopen the case," says Rep. John Conyers Jr. (D) of Michigan, one of the sponsors of the report.

Mr. Conyers says he plans to introduce an amendment to the pending anti-apartheid act that would prohibit the sale of nuclear technology to South Africa.

Sources interviewed here say that while the South Africa report may cast doubt on the Carter panel's findings, it may not be conclusive.

"The technical community most familiar with nuclear weapons believed the most logical explanation [for the flash] was a nuclear test," says Rodney Jones, a nonproliferation specialist at Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. "But there just wasn't enough collateral evidence to prove it. There were too many ambiguities in the readings."

Whether true or not, experts in nuclear nonproliferation say the two reports highlight the difficulty of containing the spread of nuclear technology. That problem was underscored last week, when a California businessman was indicted by a federal grand jury on charges of illegally exporting to Israel 800 devices used to trigger nuclear weapons.

Reports said the man allegedly purchased the devices, known as "krytrons," from a Massachusetts firm, then shipped them to an Israeli trading company without licensing approval from the US government. Such approval is required under the Arms Export Control Act. "It's incredible," adds one Senate aide. "You can just buy krytrons here, stuff them in your pocket, take a trip to Europe, and never be searched. It raises real questions about unregulated commercial markets."

Israel has denied that the krytrons have been used for nuclear weapons purposes.